

The Trial and Death of Socrates

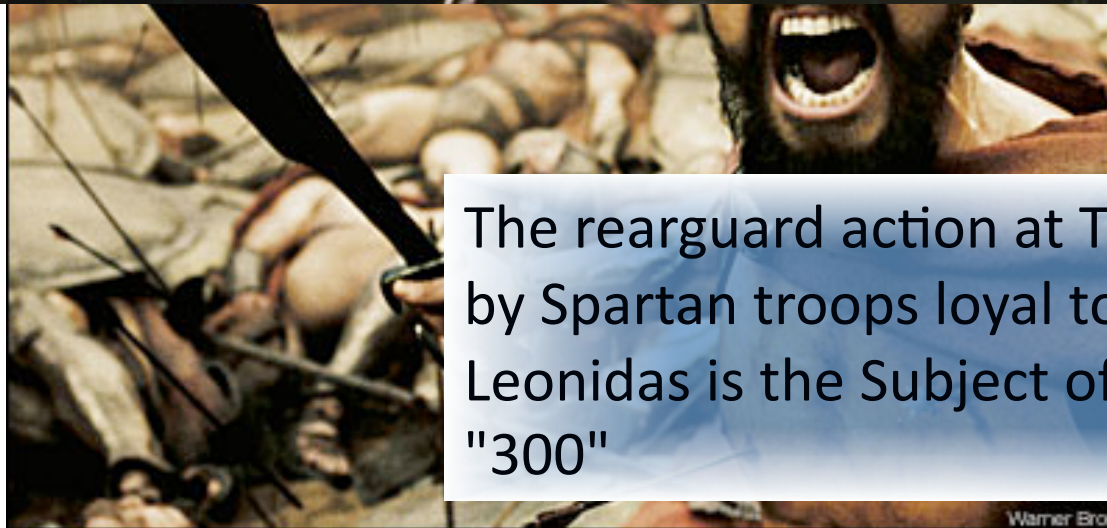


Background on Ancient

Athens



- 6th Century BC
- The area we now know as Greece is a loose and disjointed collection of city states.
- Athens and Sparta are the biggest. Together they stave off invasions by the Persian kings Darius and Xerxes.



The rearguard action at Thermopylae by Spartan troops loyal to their King Leonidas is the Subject of the movie "300"

- After repelling the Persian threat Sparta and Athens turn on each other.
- Partly as a rejection of Spartan militarism and power Athenian citizens revolt and form the oldest documented "democracy" on earth.



Euthyphro

- It is in this Classical Period of Greek History that Socrates lives (469-399 BC).
- He grows up in the Age of Pericles, an enlightened ruler of Athens who not only builds most of the structures still in existence on the Akropolis, including the Parthenon, but champions the causes of learning and art in Athenian society.



n

Socrates the man.

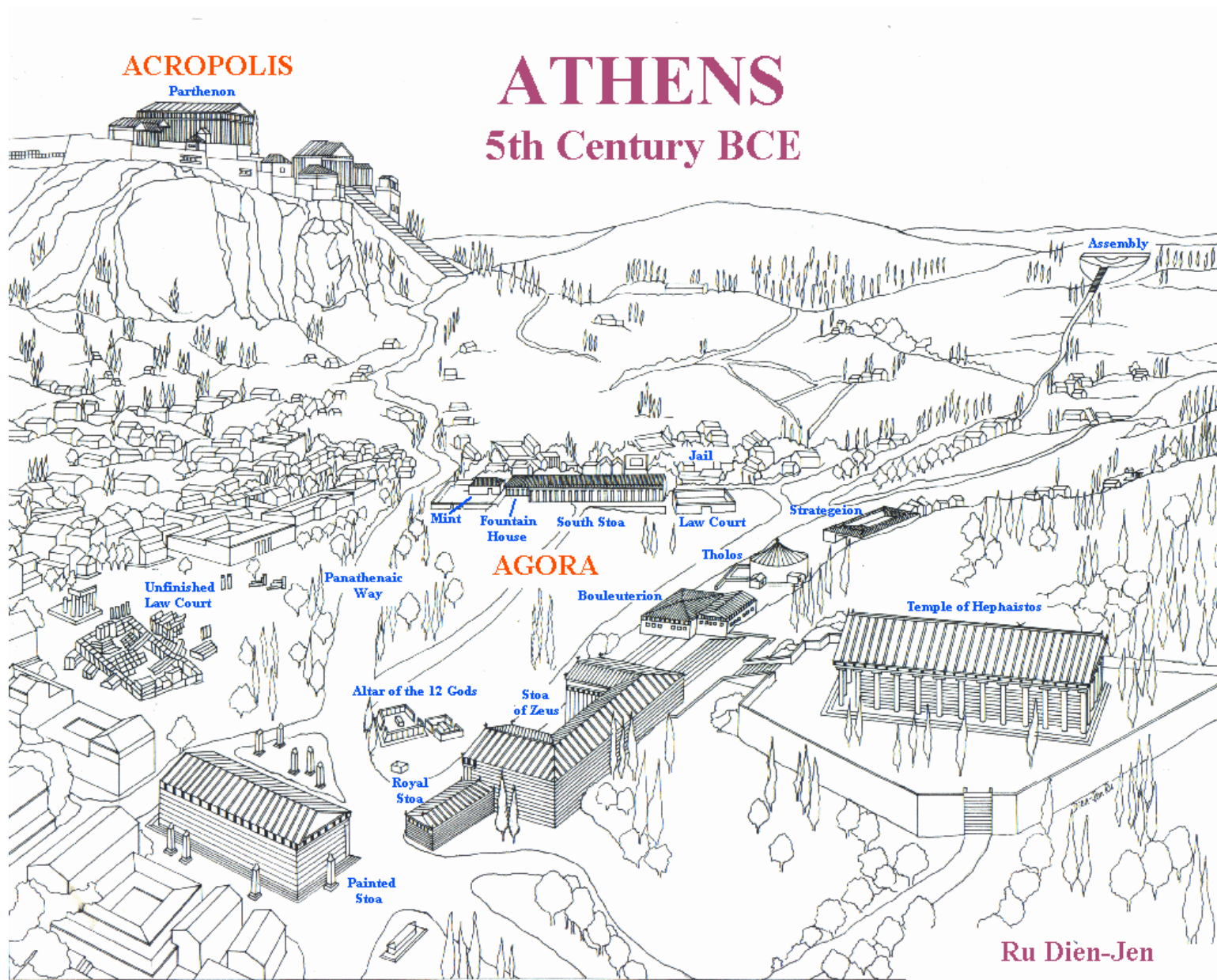
- Socrates was a son of minor aristocracy.
- Socrates devoted his life to the public and private exploration of knowledge and philosophy (which literally means “love of knowledge”)
- As such he became a public figure in the arenas of ancient Athens.
- Socrates’ habit was to publically question the knowledge of others. This did not endear him to some who held power.

Socrates the man.

- As a result, in his old age Socrates is indicted on charges of impiety and corrupting the youth.
- Many also hold that his indictment was due to his political affiliations during the recent Athenian defeat by Sparta and the oligarchic tyranny that followed.
- But the official charges are impiety and corrupting the youth.
- This sets the stage for the dialogue known as the “Euthyphro.”

Socrates the man.

- Socrates is on his way to court for a preliminary hearing to answer the charges that have been brought against him.
- He meets Euthyphro on his way to the court as well.
- The setting for the dialogue is the Agora, or central marketplace of Athens.





Setting the Stage for the Dialogue

- First, Socrates clears up why he is there. He has been brought up on charges by Meletus of corrupting the youth and impiety towards the gods.
- What is Impiety?
- For our purposes we may understand piety as goodness.
To be pious is to be good, to be impious is to be bad.

Euthyphro's court case

- Next, Socrates inquires as to why Euthyphro is there.
(3e)
- Socrates establishes that Euthyphro is a self-proclaimed expert on the divine and piety.
- So much so that he is willing, in their name, to indict his own father for murder in such a marginal case.
- Himself on trial for Impiety, and eager to prepare a defense for himself, Socrates sets out to learn from such an "expert."

First Definition

- Socrates: Tell me then, what is the pious, and what the impious, do you say?
- Euthyphro Responds with his first attempt at a definition of piousness: (5d)
- "[piousness is] to prosecute the wrongdoer."
- What is wrong with this response as a definition of piety?

First Definition

- Socrates does not want an example of an action that is pious, but to get at the *nature and definition* of piousness itself!
- "is the pious not the same and alike in every action, and the impious the opposite of all that is pious and like itself, and everything that is to be impious presents us with one *form or appearance (eidos)* in so far as it is impious?"

- το εἶδος (eidos) - form
 - form; idea; shape; pattern; essence



Euthyphro responds with his second attempt at a definition: (e7)

Euthyphro:

"What is dear to the gods is pious, what is

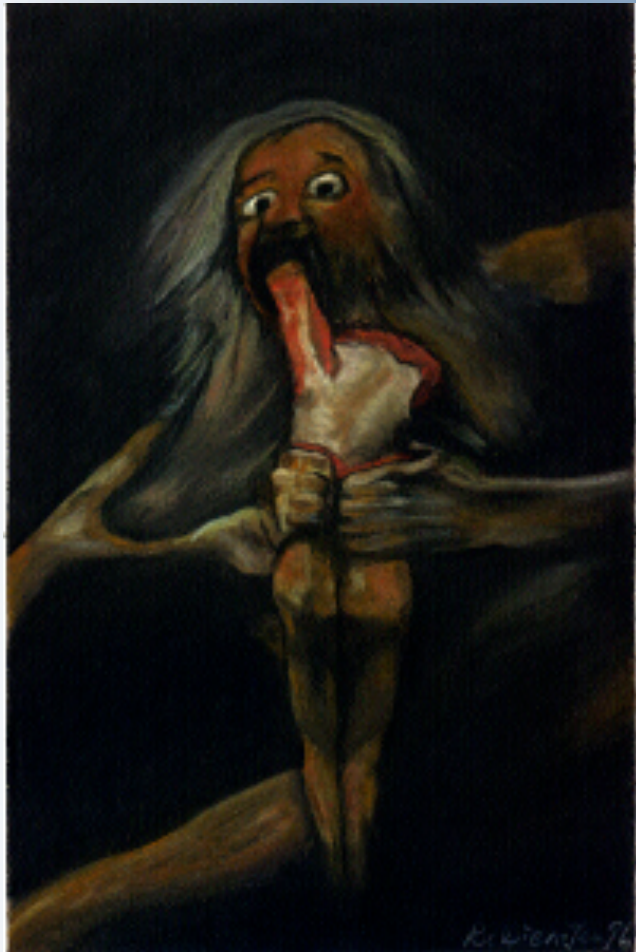


Euthyphro

- "Splendid!" Socrates says. Now Socrates has a theory to test by subjecting it to the Socratic Method.
- Pious = Loved by the gods.
And
- Impious = Hated by the gods.
- First problem: There are multiple gods. How is this a problem?

- The gods are often at odds with each other.
- Euthyphro himself has already cited the fact that Zeus "the best and most just of the gods" first bound and then castrated his own father Cronos for mistreating his own sons (which included eating them!). (5e)

Cronos, by Goya and Rubens



- If the gods are at odds with each other that means that the same thing might be loved by some gods and hated by others. So something could be both pious and impious at the same time!
- Showing his aversion to theological debates, Socrates sets aside this concern and accepts Euthyphro's revision of his theory:
- "I would certainly say that the pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is impious."
- For our modern purposes we can interpret this as the moral theory of **divine command**.

- The theory of Divine Command: All moral force comes from God.
- Things are good because gods wills them to be good, and things are bad because god wills them to be bad.
- Lying is bad because God says so.
- Saving lives is good because God says so.
- And Socrates responds with a question: (9e)

The Euthyphro Dilemma

- “Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?”
- It must be one or the other (hence the dilemma), and Socrates argues for one of the two possibilitieswhich?
- “It is being loved then because it is pious, but it is not pious because it is being loved.” (10d)

First Horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma

- If actions are loved by the gods because they are pious then the actions are pious first, and their being loved by the gods is merely a quality they have as a result of this piousness they *already possess*!
- In this case gods will, or gods love is irrelevant to the fact that these actions are pious, they were pious before the gods loved them, their piousness is why they are loved. Their being loved is merely a side-effect.
- “You told me an affect or quality of it, that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the gods, but you have not yet told me what the pious is.” (11b)

Second horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma

- Although Euthyphro never takes this tack, there is an obvious move on behalf of someone wanting to defend the divine command theory.
- One could claim that it is not that god loves the pious, but that actions are pious because god loves them. Take the second option that Socrates presents.
- “Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?”

Second horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma

- However, if we claim that things are pious only because they are loved by the gods then we run into the following problems.
- 1. Arbitrariness.
 - If murder is wrong just because god says so, then god could just as well have said that murder, rape and genocide are good.
 - If one responds that no, these things could not possibly have been loved by god, i.e. good, because of some quality, like viciousness, they possess, then you are back to the first horn of the dilemma. Then these things are wrong because they are vicious, and the fact that god hates them is simply another quality they possess irrelevant to their being morally bad.

Second horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma

- The second problem with the second horn of the dilemma.
- 2. Moral abdication.
 - “To deliver oneself over to a moral authority for directions about what to do is simply incompatible with being a moral agent. To say ‘I will follow so-and-so’s directions no matter what they are and no matter what my own conscience would otherwise direct me to do’ is to opt out of moral thinking altogether; it is to abandon one’s role as a moral agent.” – James Rachels, *God and Human Attitudes*

The Options:

- A: The morally right is right because it is commanded by God.
- Then “there can be no inherent moral reason why this rather than that ought to be commanded.” – Anthony Flew
- B: God commands that which is morally right because it is morally right.
- Then there are “standards of right and wrong which are independent of God’s will.” – Anthony Flew

Socrates' dashed hopes...

- After failing for the third time to convince Socrates Euthyphro hurries off claiming it is time for him to go.
- “What a thing to do my friend! By going you have cast me down from a great hope that I had, that I would learn from the nature of the pious and the impious and so escape Meletus’ indictment by showing him that I had acquired wisdom in divine matters from Euthyphro [...]”